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Judy Collins
interview



both sides now

What on
Earth
is government
doing to our health?

BC Ministry of Health drops bombs on drug safety testing
Health Canada decimates perfectly safe natural health products as
Big Pharma grabs monopoly while adverse drug reactions proliferate

Freda

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Pharmageddon

Artist Anthony Freda

In 1962 Thalidomide's horrific drug disaster caused babies to be born without limbs. To stop pharmaceutical industry marketing excesses, and to prevent such tragedies, publicly funded independent drug trials were established. Unfortunately, drug companies lobbied to eliminate public testing, such as our own UBC's Therapeutic Initiative, and BC Ministry of Health's drug

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safety trials. These public drug safety trials have been slammed by government firing the very people who protected us. This coincides with the provincial government courting millions of dollars from drug company to invest in BC. By eliminating public watchdogs and whistle blowers BC Liberals perverts BC's slogan into "the Best Place on Earth" for Pharmaceutical companies.

Ministry of Health carpet-bombs drug safety monitoring

The tragedy of Roderick MacIsaac

by Alan Cassels

image by Anthony Freda

Unanswered questions around the death of a Ministry of Health employee might hold some clues to the biggest scandal to ever hit BC's drug evaluation system.

Linda Kayfish's voice weighs heavily with exasperation as she speaks to me about her brother Rod. He was the only family member she had left and he died in December 2012, three months after having been fired from a co-op position at the BC Ministry of Health.

Last summer, he and other employees involved in evaluating drug safety in the BC Ministry of Health were told of an investigation into alleged wrongdoings. Since then, a massive inferno of scandal and mystery has engulfed the Ministry of Health Pharmaceutical Services Division (PSD). The death of Roderick MacIsaac is just one more inexplicable flame.

"Why do we have to wait so long?" Linda asks me, frustrated because there are no answers and because it's clear to her no one is in any hurry to supply them.

This story involves a dizzying array of actors: The BC Coroner, the RCMP and the Privacy Commissioner. They are all part of "ongoing investigations" along with the BC Ministry of Health, which is facing a series of lawsuits and grievances from employees who are suing the organization for wrongful dismissal and defamation.

So far, nine people have lost their jobs – most of them terminated suddenly – and several contractors have had their contracts cancelled with no explanation. A number of important drug safety evaluations have been halted, studies that were trying to determine whether a number of widely prescribed and very profitable drugs for the

companies that make them are harming us.

It all started on March 28, 2012, when a complaint was filed with the BC's Auditor General about the way contracts were being awarded and how research was being conducted within PSD.

PSD oversees annual spending of \$1.2 billion on pharmaceuticals, the fastest growing of all areas of health spending. This growth is fuelled by unrelenting pressure from pharmaceutical companies that strive to ensure their products are generously covered by the public purse.

Roderick MacIsaac was a student at the University of Victoria working on a PhD in Public Administration and examining the safety of a handful of drugs used to help people quit smoking. One of the drugs he was studying was the controversial drug Champix, which carries serious warnings of risks of heart attacks and psychiatric effects. Rod worked with a small evaluation unit within PSD, a handful of economists and data analysts under the direction of two academic researchers who helped them design and facilitate drug evaluations. In the course of this work, the evaluations could show that some medications are not doing what their manufacturers' claim and may, in fact, be shown to be killing or injuring people.

The Ministry of Health created a team of government investigators to try to "examine financial controls, contracting, data management and employee/contractor relationships." By mid-summer, the PSD's head, Assistant Deputy Minister Barbara Walman, suspended without pay a handful of employees alleging misuse of health data and contracting methods, but there were no

specifics. Other drug evaluators had their data access suspended and were left in limbo.

All drug safety evaluations carried out by the UBC-based Therapeutics Initiative (TI) were halted. The TI has been an independent voice on pharmaceuticals since the mid 1990s, with an international reputation for its meticulous and thorough drug reviews. Because it couldn't be bamboozled by the pharmaceutical industry, over time, the TI became Big Pharma's Enemy #1 in BC. Five years ago, the reigning Liberal government created a "Pharmaceutical Task Force" to review the



No one has any answers as to why government employees, some with more than 25 years of service in the Ministry, were simply discarded.

activities of Pharmacare and stacked it with people with pharmaceutical industry ties. Its main conclusion? Dismantle the TI. See www.health.gov.bc.ca/library/publications/year/2008/PharmaceuticalTaskForceReport.pdf

The TI's budget was subsequently cut, its influence reduced and the important work of advising government on the value and safety of new drugs was severely curtailed.

continued p.6...

On September 6, 2012, the day after being appointed by the Premier as the new Minister of Health, Dr. Margaret MacDiarmid and her Deputy Minister Graham Whitmarsh called a press conference in the Legislature. They announced that four employees had just been fired and three more were suspended without pay. Once again, no specific reasons were given but media reports which followed painted a picture suggesting the personal health data of millions of British Columbians might have been breached and the Ministry was taking steps to punish wrongdoers and protect our future privacy.

At last count, at least nine people have lost their jobs in this scandal. There are three lawsuits against the government and Roderick and two other employees, represented by the BC Government Employees Union, filed grievances.

All of these firings are perplexing, but none more so than the firing of a lowly co-op student with three days left in his term. When Rod was fired, his evaluation of smoking-cessation drugs stopped so we'll never know whether the drugs he was evaluating were harming or killing people.

There have been many requests for information, but the stock response from the Ministry, "The matter is under investigation," has stifled all requests, save one. That one freedom of information request asked for data on the numbers of co-op students who have ever been canned from the BC government. Ever. Over the last 10 years, there have been thousands of students who have completed co-op work terms with the BC government. There is only one record of a student being fired. One. It was Roderick.

As someone who has worked in pharmaceutical policy research for 19 years, I have never witnessed a more unsettling atmosphere around the Ministry of Health. No one has any answers as to why government employees, some with more than 25 years of service in the Ministry, were simply discarded. Other parts of BC's pharmacovigilance (drug safety monitor-



A number of important drug safety evaluations have been halted, studies that were trying to determine whether a number of widely prescribed and very profitable drugs for the companies that make them are harming us.

ing) work has been disrupted. BC is part of a national group called DSEN, the Drug Safety and Effectiveness Network, which, along with other provinces, is carrying out evaluations on a range of commonly prescribed drugs.

Last month, DSEN published a very important study on the safety of cholesterol-lowering statin drugs in the *British Medical Journal*. See www.bmj.com/content/346/bmj.f880 Using large data sets across multiple jurisdictions and weapons-grade epidemiologic expertise, these researchers carried out the kind of "real world" (by definition, outside clinical trials) research the drug industry doesn't do.

Statins are known to cause muscle weakening and adverse effects on cognition, but we don't even have a complete picture of their overall safety, as some of the major statin trials (funded by the pharmaceutical companies) don't even release the full serious adverse effects data.

This DSEN study found that high dose statin users were 34% more likely to be hospitalized for acute kidney injury within four months of taking the drug, compared to those on low-dose statins. When you consider the millions of Canadians swallowing a statin every day, the overall number of people being harmed is likely in the thousands.

This study also shows why BC needs to be involved in independent, publicly funded drug evaluation. BC researchers are among Canada's best in this type of research and are skilled in using large anonymous databases where personal health privacy is never an issue.

You can look in any jurisdiction in Canada where data breaches and improper employee conduct are suspected and never find a case this aggressively pursued. After her initial alarm, the

Vitamin C and Lysine powder help prevent heart attacks

by W. Gifford-Jones M.D.



Why is heart attack the number one killer in this country? Ninety-nine percent of doctors say it's due to atherosclerosis (hardening of arteries) and that cholesterol lowering drugs are the primary way to treat it. But closed minds are ignoring facts that could save thousands of North Americans from coronary attack.

Dr. Linus Pauling, two-time Noble Prize winner, was ignored for reporting that large amounts of vitamin C and lysine are needed to prevent coronary attacks. Twenty-five years ago Pauling reported that animals make vitamin C and humans do not. That's why sailors died of scurvy during long sea voyages, but the ship's cat survived.

Vitamin C is required to manufacture healthy collagen, the glue that holds coronary cells together, just like mortar is needed for bricks.

Lysine, like steel rods in cement, makes collagen stronger. Pauling claimed it takes a mere 10 milligrams to prevent scurvy, but several thousand to prevent heart attack.

Williams Stehbens, Professor of Anatomy at Wellington University in New Zealand, proved Pauling was right. His research showed that coronary arteries closest to the heart are under the greatest pressure causing collagen to fracture resulting in the formation of a blood clot and death.

Dr. Sydney Bush, an English researcher, has now proven that vitamin C can reverse atherosclerosis. Bush took retinal photographs, then started his patients on high doses of vitamin C and lysine. One year later additional pictures showed atherosclerosis had regressed in retinal arteries.

Dr. Sydney Bush, an English researcher, has now proven that vitamin C can reverse atherosclerosis. Bush took retinal photographs, then started his patients on high doses of vitamin C and lysine. One year later additional pictures showed atherosclerosis had regressed in retinal arteries.

Fourteen years ago following my own coronary attack, cardiologists claimed it was sheer madness for me to refuse cholesterol-lowering drugs (CLD's). Instead, I decided to take high doses of vitamin C plus lysine with breakfast and the evening meal. Now you can take the right combination of Vitamin C and Lysine in a powder form I developed called Medi-C Plus™. The dosage for Medi-C Plus is one flat scoop with breakfast and the evening meal, mixed in water or juice. Medi-C Plus, from Preferred Nutrition, is available at Health Food Stores.

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Minister told us that, in this case, there is no evidence that anyone's personal health records have been used inappropriately.

For a precedence on how bad privacy breaches in Canada can be, one need look no further than the case of Captain Sean Bruyca, a Canadian Air Force officer who served in the Persian Gulf War in 1991. Without his permission or knowledge, all of his personal, medical and financial files were distributed across a wide swath of officials in the Department of Veterans Affairs, who used this as ammunition to try to silence what was a fierce critic of Canada's returning veterans. A total of 54 people had inappropriately accessed Bruyca's file; 36 received an 'administrative memo;' nine were reprimanded and nine received one-day suspensions. Nobody was fired. No one. Let's put this in context: When government employees were actually found to be egregiously breaking the law in accessing personalized files, not a single person was fired.

Which makes those firings in BC all the more mysterious. No one is more shocked than Doug Kayfish, Roderick's brother-in-law. "I come from the corporate world," he told me, adding, "You don't just go and fire senior people. But a whole department? That's sending a message."

He admired Rod who he called a "pure scientist" with an impeccable level of integrity. When his family heard that Rod had been fired, he said, "We thought that was the stupidest thing we'd ever heard. How could that possibly be? How does this even fit?"

Minister MacDiarmid said she was "deeply troubled" and told media, "The Ministry provided the Royal Canadian Mounted Police with the interim review of this investigation in August 2012." My calls to the RCMP confirmed they are "awaiting files" from the Ministry, but none of the fired employees has even been questioned by the RCMP. Some have suggested the RCMP 'involvement' is a red herring and, from the point of view of the fired employees, constant media references to the RCMP do nothing but colour the whole affair in more ominous hues.

At one news conference, the Health Minister, with a deeply furrowed brow, told reporters, "I can't really overstate how deeply troubled I am." She said she "instructed the Ministry to continue to take whatever steps are necessary to respond to these matters thoroughly." Those words, "whatever steps necessary" scare everyone involved in this nightmare, especially given the Kafkaesque interrogations of the Ministry employees who were terminated, the dread felt as the people who remain get brought in for questioning and the impenetrable secrecy which hangs over the entire affair.

I asked Linda Kayfish if she had any theories about what was going on and she didn't hesitate: "Follow the money," she said.

With BC's PharmaCare program spending more than \$1.2 billion of our money on drugs every year, there is a lot of cash to follow. Many people wonder if the drug safety evaluations done by employees like Roderick and other evaluators were finding things the pharmaceutical manufacturers didn't like. Would that be enough to lead to an anaphylactic reaction in the bureaucracy and a carpet-bombing of the Ministry of Health?

"Follow the money," repeats Linda Kayfish. "I'm looking in that direction. Makes me really wonder who else would benefit from this?" The people who were fired certainly didn't benefit from this."

Linda's voice verges on anger when she thinks of the wider impact on the other fired staff who are now filing grievances or suing the government and she asks the question many observers have asked: "Is there someone who had it in for all these people?"

The reason for our current lack of answers might be due to the revelations emerging from the Liberals' "Ethnicgate" affair, which showed that employees doing ministry business use personal email or verbal decision making to avoid the prying eyes of Freedom of Information (FOI) requests. (None of a dozen or so FOI requests submitted by myself and other journalists revealed any information.)

This complete lack of information is particularly heart wrenching. "If the goal is to keep kicking the can down the road so everyone forgets about it, then we're well on our way," Doug notes.

continued p.8...

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There are several dominant theories bubbling up in this government town as people try to explain this massive, unprecedented destruction of BC's drug safety system.

The first is the Keystone Kops theory where those Ministry officials carrying out the investigation have run amok, firing people on a whiff of wrongdoing. Many decision makers involved are relatively new: the Health Minister, her Deputy Graham Whitmarsh – who signed the letters firing people – Barbara Walman, the new ADM at PSD, Lindsay Kislock, the ADM in charge of data access and Wendy Taylor, the lead interrogator. This theory suggests the bureaucrats behind this fiasco are inexperienced and thus vulnerable to bad advice from the top. Taking a lesson from Stanley Milgram, the famous obedience researcher, they might just say, "I'm just following orders." The question then arises: "Who gave the orders?"



What is really going on in the Ministry of Health that warrants risking our health by depriving us and our doctors of reliable information about drug safety in British Columbia?

We can all speculate about who might benefit from the destruction of BC's independent drug safety system and that leads to the final theory, which we call the Big Data theory. This is premised on the potentially huge 'economic opportunity' represented by the meticulously collected health and drug use data of British Columbians. For the past year or so, we've seen people such as Colin Hansen and BC's Chair of the Data Stewardship Committee, Bruce Carleton, out there waving the 'open data' flag, suggesting that BC's health data should be shared on a for-profit basis, including selling access to it to drug companies. Last fall, Margaret MacDiarmid echoed this sentiment in the *Globe and Mail*, saying, "Instead of asking why should we open things up, what we really want to ask is, why shouldn't we?" See www.theglobeandmail.com/news/british-columbia/plan-to-unlock-bcs-trove-of-medical-data-raises-privacy-concerns/article4100976/?service=mobile

Some have theorized that halting everything, cutting off data access and implementing interminable delays in restarting things will ultimately lead to the destruction of our current system for equipping publicly funded independent scientists with data to evaluate. Once you've blown that up, it's time to move on to step #2: Open the doors to privatize our health information.

BC voters will soon go to the polls. They deserve to know one thing: What is really going on in the Ministry of Health that warrants risking our health by depriving us and our doctors of reliable information about drug safety in British Columbia?

Those of us who swallow prescription drugs deserve the best evidence about their safety. We deserve answers from this government and the next.

Resources:

The Best Place on Earth (for pharmaceutical companies) by Alan Cassels, **Focus online**, March 2013, www.focusonline.ca

Six Fired, Two Lawsuits, One Dead – But Still No Answers by Alan Cassels, **Vancouver Sun**, March 12, 2013, www.vancouversun.com

Adverse Reactions by Paul Webster, **Vancouver** magazine, April 2013, www.vancouvermagazine.com

Pharmageddon by Dr. David Healy (University of California Press, 2012), www.davidhealy.org

Alan Cassels is a pharmaceutical policy researcher and the author of **Seeking Sickness**. For the past 19 years, Cassels has worked on national and provincial studies of drug benefits policies. None of his income comes from any of the interrupted studies mentioned in this article.

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Label GMO Foods

I-522: The People's Right to Know Genetically Engineered Food Act

Labelitwa.org is an anti-GMO activist organization that has put together a piece of legislation that would mandate labelling for foods containing genetically modified ingredients. "I-522: The People's Right to Know Genetically Engineered Food Act" was submitted to the Secretary of State's office in Olympia, Washington after receiving 329,731 signatures in its defence. As did activists for California's ballot initiative to label genetically modified foods, Proposition 37, volunteers spent many hours educating other individuals about the health defects GMOs can cause and the fact that over ¾ of the food in grocery stores contain genetically modified ingredients. Washington groups are collaborating to pass a ballot initiative (I-522) that would require all genetically engineered foods sold in Washington to be labelled as such.

Initiative process

In the United States, 24 states have an initiative process. If the people want a law and they cannot get their legislators to enact it, the people may gather a certain number of signatures stipulated by the state, within a limited amount of time,

to put a proposed law on the ballot for people to vote on directly. Every state has different requirements.

Polls consistently show that the vast majority of the public (between 75 and 93 percent) want to know

if their food was produced using genetic engineering. Without disclosure, consumers of genetically engineered food unknowingly may violate their own dietary and religious restrictions.

Do you know if it's GMO? Genetically engineered foods are not proven safe and the long-term health risks on humans have not been investigated adequately. Accumulating research has prompted a growing number of countries to require mandatory labelling.

63 countries have mandatory labelling laws including Japan, Taiwan, South Korea, Thailand, India, China, Australia, New Zealand, Brazil, South Africa, Russia, Norway, Switzerland, Denmark, the UK, Ireland, Spain, Portugal, Greece, Croatia, Sweden and other nations in the European Union. Many have bans or other restrictions against genetically engineered crops and foods.

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) does not require safety assessments and does not review all genetically engineered products entering the market. When questions arise over safety, FDA can point only to studies done by the chemical or pharmaceutical companies that develop genetically engineered products. These companies themselves determine if their products are safe or "warrant analytical or toxicological tests."

Even if companies admit there are safety questions, "consultations" are voluntary. If companies decide to talk to the FDA, corporate studies are protected as trade secrets so they're not available for public review.

The FDA does not review genetically engineered seeds or crops that make their own pesticides in every cell, including the parts we eat. These genetically engineered food plants are registered as pesticides at the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). ◀

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*This clinical study was published in Archives of Dermatological Research (2007) 299 : 499-505

Where are the dead bodies, Health Canada?

Do you know that every day 290 North American citizens are killed by prescription drugs? To kill the same number of people, a jumbo jet would have to crash every day. So why are natural remedies being removed from health food stores while drugs that kill remain available?

Dr. Zoltan Rona, an expert on natural remedies, recently told me, “Health Canada has been raiding health food stores, terrorizing proprietors and confiscating natural food supplements. Could you help to stop it?” he asked me.

Rona described a *New York Times* report in which it was noted that the government’s primary suspect in 542 deaths was Pradax, a blood-thinning agent. Moreover, when this drug causes bleeding, there is no antidote to stop it. Yet Health Canada has done nothing to remove Pradax from the market. However, it has removed a competitor, the soy-derived enzyme nattokinase, a safe, effective, natural blood thinner that has not harmed anyone and has been used for centuries in Japan.

While researching this article, I interviewed several other authorities who were concerned that other natural remedies are no longer available. I also discovered a most disturbing fact. In Germany, a doctor’s prescription is now required to obtain vitamin C. A red light flashed, as I’ve recently reported that Medi-C Plus, a powder that contains a high concentration of vitamin C and lysine, can prevent and reverse coronary heart disease.

Germans now pay \$45 for 90 tablets of 500 milligrams of vitamin C. Since I take several thousands of Medi-C Plus daily, this asinine ruling would cost me \$3,600 annually for C. This shows how far governments go to control natural remedies. It’s sheer, unadulterated madness since there is no known toxic amount of

vitamin C. For instance, it’s been proven safe to give intravenous injections of several hundred thousand milligrams of vitamin C day after day intravenously to fight infection.

Today, many people are also taking Sytrinol, a natural remedy consisting of citrus and palm fruit extract, which decreases total and bad cholesterol, triglycerides, and increases good cholesterol. For the moment it’s still available and there’s no scientific reason it should be removed. But if it happens, patients will be forced to switch to cholesterol-lowering drugs whose safety record leaves much to be desired.

The Journal of the American Medical Association

claims that, every year, there are 60,000 deaths from pharmaceutical drugs in the US and 10,000 in Canada.

Alan Cassels, a drug policy researcher at the University of Victoria, says, “Cholesterol-lowering drugs are not worth the risk and history will regard CLDs as an unmitigated scandal in medicine.” Readers know I share this view. But hell will freeze over before Health Canada raises an alarm and closes the door on these multi-billion dollar risky products. Money and high-paid lobbyists have won the day in Ottawa and Washington.

Other North Americans are taking products such as BioSil to prevent osteoporosis (fragile bones). This natural silicon product safely deposits calcium and



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phosphate into bone. It's even more effective if used along with vitamin D3, which helps to absorb calcium from the bowel and vitamin K2 that deposits calcium and phosphate into bone where they belong, rather than into arteries where they cause trouble.

Will these people be forced to take drugs such as Fosamax and Actonel that have been associated with unusual fractures and degeneration of the jawbone?

If government bureaucrats are honestly interested in the welfare of medical consumers, the best way for them to make an assessment is to examine records of the dead bodies. Data collected from 57 Poison Control Centers in the U.S. showed that, in 2010, there were no deaths from the use of vitamin and herbal supplements. This in spite of the fact that, during that year, there were 60 billion doses of nutritional supplements taken.

So where will these amateur forensic bureaucrats find the dead bodies? It doesn't require a long, tedious search. *The Journal of the American Medical Association* claims that, every year, there are 60,000 deaths from pharmaceutical drugs in the US and 10,000 in Canada. Now, it's the fourth leading cause of death after cancer, heart disease and stroke.



The point is prescription drugs can kill; natural remedies, never. It's time that Health Canada learned this message. 

Dr. W. Gifford-Jones is a graduate of the University of Toronto and The Harvard Medical School. During his medical training, he has been a family doctor, hotel doctor and ship's surgeon. He is a Fellow of The Royal College of Surgeons and author of seven books. For comments, email Dr. Gifford-Jones at info@docgiff.com, www.docgiff.com

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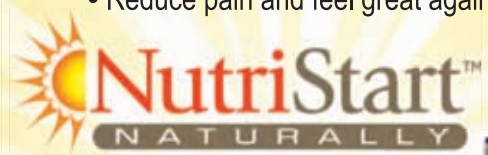
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Superstars strut their stuff

I recently attended the 6th International Congress on Vegetarian Nutrition, which is held in California roughly every five years. The 2nd Congress in 1992 was so inspiring that afterward I co-wrote the first edition of our classic *Becoming Vegetarian* (now in 15 countries in five languages) with Brenda Davis and Victoria Harrison (two dietitian colleagues).

This year I was so excited about attending I could barely get to sleep. Nutritional scientists from all over the world gather at this conference and the proceedings are published in the *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition*, the most prestigious of nutrition journals. The audience was comprised of 700 or so nutrition experts, who conduct research and publish, including Dr. Frank Hu from Harvard (Nurses Health Study) and Dr. Tim Key of Oxford.

Better eyesight linked to brightly coloured veggies and fruits

Dr. John Paul SanGiovanni of the National Eye Institute emphasized the essential nature of two substances – lutein and zeaxanthin – that come from orange, red, yellow and green veggies and fruits. These substances gather in the macula of the eye and filter and protect against damage from blue light in cells that allow fine-pattern vision. Without enough of these in our diet (pills are no substitute), age-related macular degeneration can eventually occur.

Reduce your risk of chronic disease

As we replace animal products with plant foods, we significantly reduce our risk of obesity and type-2 diabetes, clearly shown by Oxford University-based research. The study followed 34,000 meat eaters (of a particularly health conscious variety, compared with the general population), 10,000 people who eat fish but no other meat, 19,000 lacto-ovo-vegetarians and 2,500 vegans. Their dietary choices, diseases and causes of death have been tracked since 1993.

These findings were backed up by the Adventist Health Study-2 that included 96,000 generally health conscious people with various dietary patterns from across Canada and the US. As it turns out, vegans have a lower body mass index (BMI) with average body weights in the healthy range (vs. being overweight). Vegans also have significantly lower blood pressure, serum cholesterol levels, rates of diabetes and female cancers. Lacto-vegetarians have reduced risk of gastrointestinal cancers. Vegetarians and vegans have far less likelihood of developing heart disease and cancers in general compared with non-vegetarians. Along with a plant-based diet, be sure to take a vitamin B12 supplement as part of a multivitamin or take 1,000 mcg twice a week.

Safety of soyfoods

Unfounded rumours (promoted by competitive industries, if you trace the source) have thrown a negative light on soyfoods. As it turns out, soyfoods are clearly protective against prostate cancer for men and researchers showed how the protective effects work in cells that have gone awry. Giving your little girl or teen daughter soy is a great way to protect her against breast cancer in later life. And for those who have developed breast cancer, recent studies show soyfoods reduce risk of recurrence by 25%. Just don't overdo it; two to three servings a day are enough for anyone. Problems occurred when two men (independently) chose to consume 12 or 14 servings of soy a day for months on end – not a good idea!

Italians presented unique and fascinating research on the environmental impact of various dietary choices; we'll cover this in a future column. ◀

Vesanto Melina is a local dietitian and author. www.nutrispeak.com

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Dawning of the Age of Agrarius

I recently met my first Young Agrarian (YA) at a farmer-2-farmer conference on Vancouver Island. A Young Agrarian is self-described as someone who values food, farmers, nature and community and is intent on growing food sustainably. YA is partnered with FarmFolk CityFolk, a not-for-profit society that cultivates local, sustainable food systems. FFCF are the movers and shakers of a new movement made up of young agriculturalists, farmers, market and community gardeners, organizations and the public who want to ecologically rebuild local agriculture.

We need to support Young Agrarians because these are the folks who will be feeding us in the near future. "Love Your Farmer!" The future on Vancouver Island looks rosy if we get to work turning the network of fertile valleys up and down the island from fallow fields into fields of food. If we created an Islands Diet for this island and the coastal communities, we would become a destination location for foodies who would come to savour the delights of artisan-produced food and drink. We would not only grow our way around the impending recession and make ourselves food secure, we would also improve our health and quality of life; most importantly, though, we would grow our way around Monsanto.

To accomplish this, we need to declare these islands GE-FREE zones because of cross-pollination between GM crops and organic crops. We are at a crossroads and we need to make a decision about how we will be fed in the future. The choice is biotech food (our government's agenda) or organic food (preference of the people). One food system nurtures the soil and the other destroys it. For me, this makes the choice crystal clear.

Witnessing the current breakdown of the climate and the way it affects food distribution and price should convince us of the virtues of bringing our food back home. Living on an earthquake fault with the *big* one waiting to rupture should be another good reason. (Today, 95 percent of our food arrives on BC ferries!) But it is the deterioration of health we are seeing in the whole population from a lack of nutrient-dense foods that should concern us the most.

The time has come to discuss and rate the nutritional value of food. Nutritional analysis will put an end to any uncertainty as to which system we should be supporting. Perhaps we could adopt a simple scale from 1-5 to show us how much nourishment there is in a food item? Then we could more easily balance an intake of junk food with real food to improve health.

The most sensible thing to do is to fund, educate and support the Young Agrarian movement. Offer your help to reshape our food system and email theyoungagrarians@gmail.com. We will all be better off for it and I'd rather have the YA-sayers than the NAY-sayers any day.

Resources:

youngagrarians.org farmer2farmer.ca farmfolkcityfolk.ca

Carolyn Herriot is author of *The Zero Mile Diet* and *The Zero-Mile Diet Cookbook* (Harbour Publishing). She grows Seeds of Victoria at The Garden Path Centre. Online catalogue available at www.seedsofvictoria.com

Where have all the farmers gone?

In 2006, Canada's farming population reached an historic low. (Stats Can). In 1931, one in three Canadians lived on a farm. Today, that number has plummeted to one in 46 (less than two percent of the population). In BC, more than 50 percent of farmers are aged 59 and up, with less than five percent 34 and younger. (Source: www.fraserbasin.bc.ca/publications/indicators.html Fraser Basin Council's 2010 Sustainability Snapshot, www.youngagrarians.org)

Democracy, for a change

When news broke that a by-election was imminent in Labrador following the resignation of Peter Penashue – the disgraced Conservative MP who stepped down following news about his election financing irregularities – I called Green Party leader Elizabeth May and asked her to consider having the Green Party Electoral District Association (EDA) not run a candidate in the upcoming by-election. In light of Penashue's election by a mere 79 votes in 2011, it seemed imperative to consult the local riding associations in question, to see if they felt collaboration was appropriate. The result is that the Green Party announced it will not run a candidate in the Labrador by-election. They even asked the NDP to consider doing the same.

This illustrates the potential of the one-time cooperation strategy I am proposing as a key element of the political platform in my campaign. In almost 60 ridings in 2011, Conservative candidates won with less than 50% of the vote. My proposal is a one-time agreement, initiated at the local riding level in communities where Conservatives won due to splitting of progressive votes. As leader, I will empower Liberal riding associations to assess the circumstances in their own communities and decide if cooperation with other progressive candidates is right for them – a truly democratic process. A Liberal, Green and NDP candidate would still be nominated in every riding. However, ridings that choose to cooperate would then engage in a progressive “primary” style run-off, a transparent process in which the candidate deemed most likely to beat the Conservative candidate would be selected.


Let's work together – starting in Labrador – to give
Canadians the democracy they deserve.

If progressive parties can set aside their differences to overcome our dysfunctional elections and defeat Stephen Harper in 2015, the focus will then shift to the reform of Canada's ailing democratic systems. This isn't just about winning the next election. This is about creating a more representative and collaborative Parliament that better serves Canadians and combats voter apathy. My record of leadership in business and government is grounded in my cooperative approach and cooperation is the hallmark of progressive Liberal governments of the past.

Other progressive parties will participate because it's what Canadians want. Many Liberal riding associations are cooperating at the local level right now and are in regular contact with Green Party and NDP riding associations. I am confident the public's determination to achieve cooperation to defeat Stephen Harper will prevail.

Let's be clear. Electoral cooperation is far from the same thing as merging. Cooperation does not compromise party identity; nor does it lessen the distinct values each party espouses. It means we are working together in the best interests of Canadians to achieve a common goal, just like NHL hockey players who cooperate to form Team Canada in order to win gold at the Olympics and then go back to competing against each other afterwards. Except the “gold medal” this time is that we get to reform our electoral system and make Parliament more representative.

As Liberal leader, I will drive a national process to rethink our electoral system. We will seek input from the public, parties and experts across the country. We will look at best practices from around the world, with the goal of crafting a made-in-Canada system that ensures fair, straightforward elections and reinvigorates our democracy for decades to come.

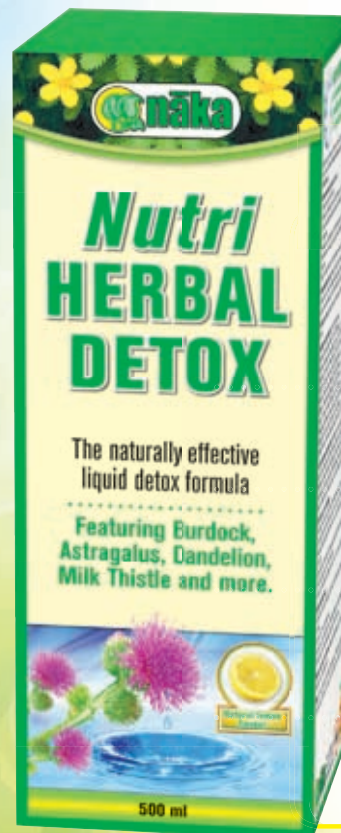
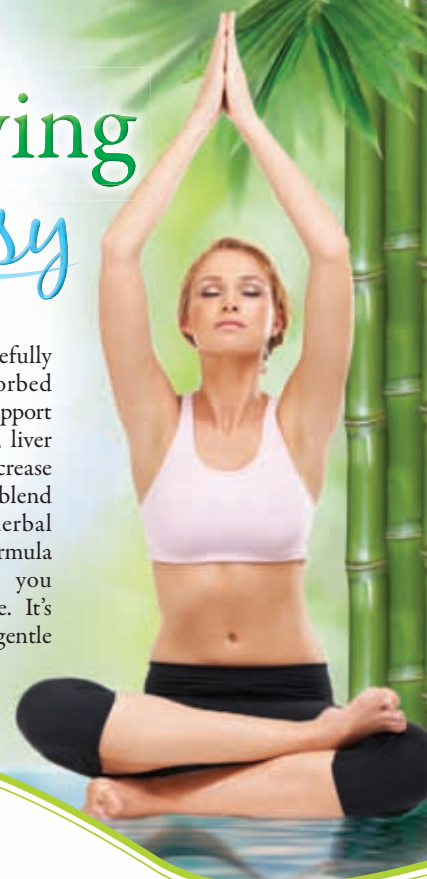
Canada is too important to let Stephen Harper win another majority simply because our archaic electoral system encourages vote-splitting. So let's work together – starting in Labrador – to give Canadians the democracy they deserve. 

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ALL OF LIFE'S activities are synchronized with the movement of the Moon and planets. Each month, we experience a new and full Moon. The new Moon signals the start of any new activity. It's sort of like a seedling bursting forth from its shell, reaching towards its potential. The full Moon indicates a time of great activity, excitement, fulfilment and completion. Any planet connected to the new or full Moon will show its effects throughout the month and especially at the new and full Moon times. Interestingly, Mars sits close to the new Moon on April 10. This is an indicator of vigorous spring activity. Mars represents effort, action and aggression. This dynamic new Moon takes place in the fourth house, which represents land and real estate and where we live. The fourth house also has to do with family life, homes, parents, education and according to the Vedic scriptures, vehicles as well. Maybe it's time to purchase that new car or home.

My bet is that we're going to be very busy with our spring tasks and I wouldn't be surprised if there was a strong spike in the real estate markets. We can expect a fair amount of jousting and fighting when the competition heats up as the power types seek their destiny. Fires, incidents and accidents are on the menu, as Mars has the propensity to stir things up. On the positive side of the coin, Mars invigorates, inspires and fuels us with passion, energy and strength. Venus is very close to Mars at the time of the new Moon and is another indicator that we will be full into whatever captures our attention and interests.

Love is in the air and life here in La-La land hums on nicely. It's especially nice in the sense that Venus and Mars are the traditional planets of love, romance and passion. The full Moon lunar eclipse on April 25 also has Mars strongly in



ARIES Mar 21 - Apr 19

You are intuitive and instinctive and now you must use those gifts in order to get where you're going. The Aries new Moon on April 10 signals a new start and fresh opportunities. Action and attraction and love and romance, along with some high adventure, are on the cosmic menu. Destiny is heading your way.



TAURUS Apr 20 - May 21

By the light of the silvery moon on April 25, many realities coalesce. Your inner psyche becomes illuminated and you see the pathway ahead. Powerful and profound lessons are on-board and you gain great wisdom. Gains and losses are in the play. It's time to let go of what is no longer worthy or useful.



GEMINI May 22 - Jun 20

The new Moon on April 10 takes place in your solar eleventh house, which is the house of friendships, groups and societies. A whirlwind of events, gatherings and other social commitments keep you hopping throughout the month. Jupiter continues to pour on the abundance, bringing precious gifts into your life. Embrace it all.



CANCER Jun 21 - Jul 22

You can expect a busy and demanding time throughout April. You may not mind and might actually enjoy it. The pace mellows after the Sun enters Taurus on April 19. The last half of the month is more to your liking and good times are indicated. Mix and mingle, wheel and deal, as opportunities for advancement come up.




LEO Jul 23 - Aug 22

When we put the boat in the water at high tide, the task is easy. At low tide, we struggle, strain, cuss and wrestle with the task. The first half of April is your high tide time while in the second half of the month, it will be tougher to get things done.



VIRGO Aug 23 - Sep 22

Life becomes more meaningful and its mysteries deepen. You may be in wonderment about it all and the urge to seek understanding, knowledge and wisdom will be very strong. Go with it; go into it. Seek and you shall discover. Your solar career sector is hot and you should apply yourself accordingly. Your timing is good.

the picture, Saturn too. It's not pretty when Mars and Saturn are involved with a lunar eclipse. We're faced with limitations and frustrations and the pickings are not easy. Heads will roll and some of the power types will step aside as controversy and conflict hit the front pages throughout the month. The last 10 days of April are especially fraught with great tension and concern. But while somewhat painful, the process is necessary. Mid-May, when the dust settles and the air clears, we will see who is still standing. It's time to roll up our collective sleeves and get to work. 



LIBRA Sep 23 - Oct 22

The Aries new Moon on April 10 has Venus and Mars involved and they cast their energies your way. Love and adventure, action, excitement and attraction are on the cosmic menu. Set a pace that you can handle, as the demands on your time will be amped to the max. Clashes may occur.



SCORPIO Oct 23 - Nov 21

The full Moon lunar eclipse on April 25 takes place in your sign. It is an important time. The two heavyweights, Mars and Saturn, are involved, indicating an intense turn of events that will need your full attention. Your inner psyche is illuminated and you see the reality of your situation. Late April tells the tale.



SAGITTARIUS Nov 22 - Dec 21

Your solar fifth house is lit up like a Christmas tree. Topics that rule the fifth house are children, romance, business, enterprise, gambling and entertainment. Lord Jupiter casts his benevolent glance your way as well, indicating that your timing is good. Partnership potential is strong, romantic or business-wise. Watch for overstating the facts, though.



CAPRICORN Dec 22 - Jan 19

It's time for some work around the house and some in-house work as well. The instinct to put it all together is strong. It is also a time for some deep inner reflection and re-evaluation of your values. Keep an open-hand policy and don't be afraid to let things go, if they must go.



AQUARIUS Jan 20 - Feb 19

You may be at an impasse, a crossroad or a fork in the road; serious decisions must be made in order for you to release the burdens you have been carrying in that urn on your shoulder for many years now. The April stars are aligned in a way that will help you to see the way.



PISCES Feb 20 - Mar 20

April starts off with a bang. Possibly, you bang heads with someone and unkind words are exchanged. The first half of the month has its challenges. Late April is more to your liking. Finances may be on your mind. Home, family and real estate activities are indicated. Diet and health considerations come up.

Mac McLaughlin has been a practising, professional astrologer for more than four decades. His popular **Straight Stars** column ran in Vancouver's largest weekly newspaper for 11 years. Email mac@macsstars.com or call 604-731-1109

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Just now

an interview with Eckhart Tolle

To read Eckhart Tolle's latest column, please see the current print edition of Common Ground. For copyright reasons, we are authorized to publish this column in our print version only.

JR: In your new book, I feel like you're the modern equivalent of the explorers that came to the new world, but an explorer and documenter of consciousness, discovering a new world.

ET: Yes, discovering is the right word. It's not that you need to make a great effort to attain it or bring it about or acquire it. It's discovering it's already there in you – conscious awareness that's obscured, or partially obscured, in many people. It's a discovery of something already there.

It's like waking up after a dream, because identification with the thinking mind and its stories and the old emotional conditioning is like being immersed in a kind of dream world, which very often turns into a nightmare – acting out old conditioned patterns again and again. The whole structure of the egoic mind is an old dysfunction.

There's some evidence that the ego started about 6,000 years ago, but nobody can say for sure. Before that, humans were in a state of innocence. When we go beyond the dysfunction of the ego, we regain our original innocence, but on a much deeper level. This is why Jesus said unless we become as little children we cannot enter the kingdom of heaven.

So, returning to the original innocence, and at the same time going much deeper into that with full awareness – that's the process. We're coming out of thousands of years of dreadful suffering, almost the whole of recorded history of humanity. If you really look at it in an unbiased way, as if you'd never seen it before, one cannot but admit that, to a large extent, 80 to 90 percent of it is a history of pathological insanity, the suffering that humans have created for themselves and, of course, inflicting it upon others.

JR: And exporting it through colonization to the new world.


ET: Yes, so the important part of the awakening process is the realization of the insanity in human history, collectively, to this day playing itself out in world events. Also, to be aware of the insanity within oneself – old, dysfunctional patterns that come again and again that create suffering. So when you see that you're insane, then you're not completely insane. Sanity comes the moment you realize the fact of insanity. To see insanity is not a negative thing.

JR: At least you're out of denial.

ET: Yes, that's why in the film *A Beautiful Mind*, for example, which is about a mathematical genius who did have a mental dysfunction, his mind was developed in certain areas but he was also insane. The viewer of the film doesn't know that until a certain point when the character realizes that many of his experiences are delusions. At that moment, his healing begins. He's not cured yet, but his healing begins because he's recognized his own insanity. That recognition can only come out of sanity, which is the awareness of unconditioned consciousness.

JR: I remember you saying before you published your last book that the next one would be about why there isn't peace on this planet. Was finding a solution one of the major intentions of *A New Earth*?

ET: Yes, to see the nature of the major dysfunction. That's why I talk quite a bit about the ego in this book. We need to recognize the nature of the dysfunction. Sometimes, even very great Eastern teachers sometimes neglect that part because they're not really touched by the magnitude of, especially, the Western ego. So it's very important for us to see the dysfunction so that we can recognize it when it arises.

Part of the new book is about recognizing the ego, which I regard as a semi-autonomous energy. It's an energy field. Every thought you think is an energy field. It has a form and then it dissolves and then there is another form. The ego itself is an energy field and it has a collective and individual aspect. 

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Where it began

Creative Transformations

As a young spiritual seeker in Kitsilano, I was drawn to Indian mysticism and inspired by the books of Yogananda, Ram Dass, Carl Jung and Laura Huxley. Fuelled by a need to understand the mysteries of life, I delved into meditation, self-hypnosis and spirituality, reading voraciously. I meditated and practised yoga at a time when people thought yoga was “weird” and ate whole foods long before they were fashionable or empirically validated.

During my ashram years, I noticed that many of my fellow devotees were calm while meditating and the opposite when they were not. A spark was ignited; I wanted to find a way to bring healing to the mind as well as the spirit. In western terms, that integration is called transpersonal psychology: a return to the origins of the word “psychology,” the study of the soul.



Lorraine Milardo Bennington,
founder, Creative Transformations

My hypnotherapy studies began with a 30-hour self-hypnosis course. Once I became a psychologist, I took many advanced hypnosis training courses and integrated them into my practice. Carl Jung inspired me greatly, with his understanding of the shadow and the collective unconscious.


I was lucky to spend time with some of the greats of the hypnosis world, among them the late renowned Frank Hanley (MD), who had agreed to formally mentor me. Unfortunately, he died before that could come to pass. Dr. Hanley was the first person to do hypnosis

in the Supreme Court of Canada. He regaled us with the story of how he used a timepiece, waving it back and forth in front of the witness' eyes. We all knew the watch was unnecessary, but it brought a note of theatre into the proceedings.

I took courses with Dr. Dan Arousz, who used hypnotherapy to help those with sexual dysfunction. I also studied with the brilliant and unassuming Dr. David Cheek, who told us how he had convinced a breech baby in utero to turn around for the sake of her mother. She did and was delivered without medical intervention.

These and other mentors held up a lantern on the path I walked.

My formal counselling career began at a Christmas craft fair held at Concordia University, in Montreal, my hometown. I made and sold silver jewellery in a booth next to a potter who had applied to a Masters program at McGill. It sounded so good that I applied for it and was accepted! I was a full-time graduate student raising a one-and-a-half-year-old, the ultimate juggling act. Somehow I managed, feeling empowered. If I could do this, I could accomplish anything and inspire others as well.

We moved to Vancouver after I graduated, drawn by the beauty and warmer climate. By 1983, I had established a full-time hypnosis and counselling practice, giving lectures to women's groups and appearing on a number of talk radio shows. I later moved to Hawaii for 10 years, but that's a story for another time. 

Lorraine Bennington has been a registered psychologist in private practice since 1980. Creative Transformations Ltd. was established in 1987. She specializes in the integration of psychology, hypnotherapy and coaching. 604-871-4342, transformance@shaw.ca, www.creativetransformations.ca



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Water and food first

Despite its huge area, Canada has relatively little dependable farmland. After all, a lot of our country is rock or buried under ice and snow. Fertile soil and a friendly climate are hard to find. To feed our growing urban populations and sustain local food security, it's critical to have productive land close to where people live.

Some regions of the country, like the Golden Horseshoe surrounding Toronto, have an abundance of class 1 soils – the best there is for food production. But there, and in most urbanized regions of Canada, increasing proportions of these superior soils now lie beneath sprawling housing developments, highways, strip-malls and other infrastructure. As urban communities have grown over the years, agricultural lands and natural areas have been drained, dug up and paved over.

Studies show that near-urban croplands and farms contribute billions of dollars in revenue to local economies each year.

Only five percent of Canada's entire land base is suitable for growing food. According to a study by Statistics Canada, our spreading cities sprawl over what was once mostly farmland. Urban uses have consumed over 7,400 square kilometres of dependable agricultural land in recent decades – an area almost three times the size of Prince Edward Island.

Almost half of Canada's urban base now occupies land that only a few generations ago was farmed. Most of it can never be used for agriculture again. Though there are strong, sprawl-busting policies in provinces such as Ontario, with its Greenbelt Act and Greater Golden Horseshoe Growth Plan, and BC, with its renowned Agricultural Land Reserve, sadly, our urbanizing ways aren't slowing.

A recent study by the David Suzuki Foundation examined threats to farmland in a 94,000-hectare patchwork of farms, forests and wetlands circling Toronto and surrounding suburbs called the Whitebelt Study Area. The report warns that this productive mosaic of green space and rich farmland is at risk from the blistering pace of urban expansion in the Golden Horseshoe. Municipalities there propose developing more than 10,000 hectares of the Whitebelt over the next three decades.

Paving over prime farmland and natural assets like wetlands is foolhardy. Studies show that near-urban croplands and farms contribute billions of dollars in revenue to local economies each year. Today, most of Canada's towns and cities are at a crossroads. Down one path is continued low-density, creeping urban expansion – endless pavement, long commutes and traffic jams. Simply put, continued sprawl threatens the health and well-being of our communities and the ecosystems that sustain us.

In the other direction is an extraordinary new path: Ending sprawl using the principles of smart growth and creating compact, higher-density communities... surrounded by local greenbelts of protected farmland and green space.

Our political leaders and citizens must seize this opportunity to embark on a visionary path to grow our communities smarter and protect Canada's near-urban nature and farmland.

If we value local food and want to maintain the critical benefits that nature provides, we must put food and water first. That's why we're calling on municipalities and provincial governments to redouble their efforts to protect our remaining farmland and green space from costly, polluting urban sprawl. ◀

Contribute to the conversation on Twitter at #FoodAndWaterFirst. Written with contributions from David Suzuki Foundation Ontario Director Faisal Moola. Learn more at www.davidsuzuki.org

Good Eats *La Dolce Vita*

As I write this, I feel a sense of dread on behalf of the people of the US. On March 20, Monsanto managed to slip its Monsanto Protection Act through the US Senate. If signed into law by President Obama, the rider will allow farmers to plant, harvest and sell genetically engineered plants even if the crops have been ruled upon unfavourably in court. Monsanto will be able to act with impunity; no court in the nation will be able to challenge them on their lack of due diligence with regard to the safety of GMOs. What has the world come to when a corporation is above the law?

Without even knowing it, we have drifted into a situation of having to personally protect our food supply because our governments have failed us. There has never been a greater need to buy all our seed from local sources, to gather, save, trade and share seed and to diversify and grow as many different varieties of crops as possible to ensure the health of our food supply. The seed you grow today may well be the seed that saves the world when monoculture fails, as it has in the past. To protect our food supply, diversification must become the norm, and organic practices have to be learned, shared and practiced at home.

Most commercial crops are sprayed with a wide array of herbicides, pesticides, fungicides and rodent killers. After spraying, carcinogens and toxins remain on the food and we ingest them, presenting long-term health risks. You can now buy a variety of organic foods at most local stores and they are priced near the same as conventional foods. Talk to your grocery store manager and ask for organic foods.

It is healing and rewarding to work with our hands in the soil. Farming, hobby farming, gardening and turning lawns into gardens – it is amazing the amount of organic food one can grow. Hoeing, tilling, planting and nourishing a barren patch

Alastair Gregor

FOOD

of land show how healing and sustainable it is to grow food at home. In Vancouver, we can even have our own hens and honeybees and the climate allows us to grow food year-round. If you don't have any green space, you can ask friends or family with yards if you can grow food there. And if you own a home with a yard, but can't do the work yourself, ask friends to work on it with you. You will find the act of working together becomes an act of service to one another and to the community. Create your own gardening community and invite others to join you.

Monsanto will be able to act with impunity; no court in the nation will be able to challenge them on their lack of due diligence with regard to the safety of GMOs.

If you still don't know where to start, ask at a garden shop. Or post a notice on a community bulletin board or at your community centre or church, inviting people to get involved. You can also post online at Craigslist or Kijiji.

Now is the time to get your garden in. The ground is warming up and it's ripe for planting. This is your opportunity to begin living your life with healthy, renewed meaning and purpose by creating community and kinship. ▶

To advertise your restaurant, food product or service in our Good Eats section, please contact food writer Chef **Alastair Gregor** at alastair@commonground.ca. Alastair's life-long passion for food was inherited from his grandmother.



Speak your truth

Silence becomes cowardice when occasion demands speaking out the whole truth and acting accordingly. – Mahatma Gandhi

Something that is really coming up for many of my clients lately is the extent to which they do not, or cannot, speak their truth. If we are not being true to ourselves, we are not being authentic. And if we are not being authentic, we are not living the life we came here to live.

What does it mean to speak one's truth? It does *not* mean making sure everyone knows your opinion on every issue. It is *not* about being adversarial. It is actually more about our relationship with ourselves than with others.

When both our words and actions are in alignment with what is in our hearts, we are being in our truth. When we stay silent or act against what we know to be true, we are betraying ourselves.

When both our words and actions are in alignment
with what is in our hearts, we are being in our truth.

This issue is a challenge when we grow up in a culture that values conformity over individualism, emphasizes the "right" answer rather than our answer and trains us to seek approval. It could be that much of the stress and depression in our culture is a result of people being in the wrong place or with the wrong people.

The following story may or may not be true, but it is a great metaphor. It states that the reason some pilots disappeared in the Bermuda Triangle was because they mistook a string of islands for the Florida Keys and so concluded that their instrument panels must be wrong. Consequently, they flew out to sea instead of to their original destination, ran out of fuel and went down.

I tell my clients this is what happens when we navigate our lives on the basis of what we see "out there" rather than trusting our own inner "instrument panel." Examples could be as simple as accepting an invitation when you really don't want to go, doing things you do not want to do out of a sense of obligation and generally saying "yes" with your mouth when the rest of your body-mind is saying "no." It can be staying in a job or relationship that is not good for you or maintaining habits you know are harmful.

Speaking our truth is not merely the best thing for our own individual evolution, but also for our evolution as a society or species. If we see a situation that is unjust or out of integrity and we say nothing, we are condoning it. It may feel risky to speak up against something or to challenge the majority. However, if those among us who see something wrong only keep it to ourselves or gossip about it rather than speaking up or taking action, we all stay stuck.

Why it is that being in our truth is so hard? It is because ego wants everyone to like us and it doesn't want anyone to be mad at us. So we must think about why we are here. Are we here to grow in wisdom and to contribute our highest knowing and insight to move the group forward? Or are we here to "fit in" and gain the approval of the common denominator.

If we were all meant to be the same, Creator could have saved a lot of time and effort by just making us all look the same. The fact that each of us has a different face is our first clue that we were designed to bring the uniqueness of our being to this wondrous journey we just happen to be sharing together. ☐

Gwen Randall-Young is an author and psychotherapist in private practice. For articles and information about her books, Deep Powerful Change Hypnosis CDs and new "Creating Healthy Relationships" series, visit www.gwen.ca See display ad this issue.

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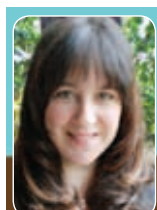
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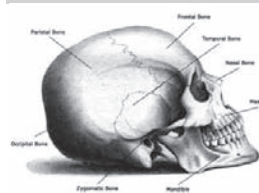
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Nobody's journey is seamless or smooth. We all stumble. We all have setbacks. It's just life's way of saying, "Time to change course."
- **Oprah Winfrey**

Judy Collins: both sides now

by Bruce Mason

The voice on the line is soothing, eerily familiar and deservedly famous – the unmistakable crystal soprano Bill Moyers once dubbed the “voice of the century.” And the conversation – typical of 73-year-old Judy Collins’ life and work – is revelatory, with unexpected twists and turns, shaped by tragedy, driven by hope.

“I stay very busy working on a new album and a PBS Special, another book, touring, writing, speaking, trying for eight hours sleep, trying to work out and experience friendly endorphins. To make time for good food and people and to read,” she says.

Collins has been sorely tested many times, and mightily. By way of background and a backdrop, events help to inform and light up her grace, elegance, longevity, intensity and relentless creativity. A piano prodigy at age five, she contracted polio and spent months isolated in hospital. Later, she was mentored by famed conductor Dr. Antonia Brico, who, disapproving of her promising student’s budding fascination with folk music and guitar, once wrung her hands saying, “Little Judy, you could have gone so far.”

Nonetheless, Collins’ non-classical, but disciplined, career soared and she later co-created the documentary *Antonia*, which was nominated for an Academy Award. Collins made her professional debut with a performance of Mozart at age 13. At 14, she attempted suicide. In 1962, shortly after her debut at Carnegie Hall, she was diagnosed with tuberculosis and spent six months recuperating in a sanatorium.

Born in Seattle and raised in Denver, Collins fought alcoholism (her father, a radio star in the golden age of wireless, was blind and an alcoholic prone to periodic rages, yet she still celebrated him in song) and other demons such as depression and bulimia. She has been sober since 1978, despite the suicide of her only child at age 33 in 1992. “My son also had addictions and relapsed. Suicide is like cancer was 50 years ago, a terrible legacy people don’t talk about. What’s happening, including to many young and military people, is tragic and treatable,” says Collins, who speaks tirelessly on suicide prevention, along with other issues such as arts education funding.

“We can’t throw in our cards. Suffering is part of the price of being alive and we must find the truth and learn to speak it, no matter how difficult. I always wanted to be a sort of bad-ass, but come off somewhat angelic, smelling like a wildflower,” admits Collins, who posed nude for her “Wildflower” album (the negatives are still smouldering in the vaults of Elektra records) and created her own Wildflower label to help sow the talents of other artists.

“I don’t know why we Americans can’t get a gun law, reaffirm voters rights and agree on finances and that the world won’t deal with the disgusting fact that the rich get richer and richer and richer,” she adds. “But I do know



Everything that happens is important
for what it reveals and we have to
show up, participate in the process
and great adventure, pursue what
we’re called to and love, finding
ways to get it out into the world.

absolutely, that, rather than despair, we must remain optimistic; pain travels side by side with joy and darkness is followed by dawn and another chance. And I believe that all life is political, down to how we treat other beings, earn a living and what we choose to support, or not. Everything that happens is important for what it reveals and we have to show up, participate in the process and great adventure, pursue what we’re called to and love, finding ways to get it out into the world,” she advises.

In 1969, summoned to testify at the infamous trial of the Chicago Seven, she began by singing, *Where Have All the Flowers Gone?* until the judge ordered a hand to be placed over her mouth saying, “We’re not here to be entertained.” Unrepentant almost 50 years later, she says, “Thanks to Steve Jobs and others, book and record stores are closing and attention is shifting. But doors are also opening; it’s time for a new movement, to take back the flowers, for fairness and to silence guns. I recorded *Amazing Grace* and sing it because I think people want and need to hear it – a hymn about redemption and renewal of the spirit, written by John Newton,

a slave-trader who became transformed as an outspoken abolitionist.”

As much as anything in her career which includes 40-plus albums, paintings, a handful of books and counting, Collins is credited with introducing Jacques Brel, Kurt Weil, Stephen Sondheim, Randy Newman and other composers to different, larger audiences.

“I look for some magic and something that clicks,” she says of her ongoing, eclectic search and creation, including a legendary find: “I met Leonard Cohen in the mid-‘60s. He had been in Greece and was unaware of the folk boom, heading to Nashville from Montreal, with a notion of pursuing country music to supplement his income as a poet. In my living room, he apologized for his singing and guitar playing, even doubting that what he was writing were songs. I was mesmerized and wanted more.

“After he finished writing *Suzanne*, he sang it to me over the phone and I invited him to an anti Vietnam War Town Hall where I dragged him on-stage. He stopped partway through the song saying, ‘I can’t go on.’ Collins remembers the pivotal moment, saying, “I pushed him back and the crowd went wild. In turn, he encouraged me to write until I finally walked over to a piano and finished my first composition, *Since You’ve Asked*, in less than an hour.

Admiring Canadian songwriters – Gordon Lightfoot, Ian Tyson, Joni Mitchell and others – she says, “There’s a freedom in their lyrics, a different, more literate view that I think allowed me to do things I was capable of and to explore other realms.”

And Stan Rogers?

“During the pouring rain at a festival in Nova Scotia I almost fell over when I heard him and the crowd roaring out *Northwest Passage* like an anthem. I’ll tell you what: here’s a commitment I’ll make to *Common Ground* readers. I will learn that song and sing it in Vancouver on May 9. It’s going to be an exciting evening.”

On stage, she will divide her time between her “Judy Collins” Martin guitar and the Chan’s Steinway, dipping into her most recent album *Bohemian, Judy Collins Sings Lennon and McCartney* and stories from her candid biography *Sweet Judy Blue Eyes*.

“Music is always moving around in my mind. I try to sing every song as if it’s the first time and I intend to go on performing around the world, as long as it’s a possibility,” she concluded. ◀

Bruce Mason is a Vancouver and Gabriola-Island based five-string banjo player, gardener, freelance writer and author of **Our Clinic**. brucemason@shaw.ca

Judy Collins performs at the **Chan Centre** for the Performing Arts, Vancouver, **May 9, 8PM**. Tickets at www.ticketmaster.ca

Whatever happened to the promise of leisure time?

Art and text by Geoff Olson

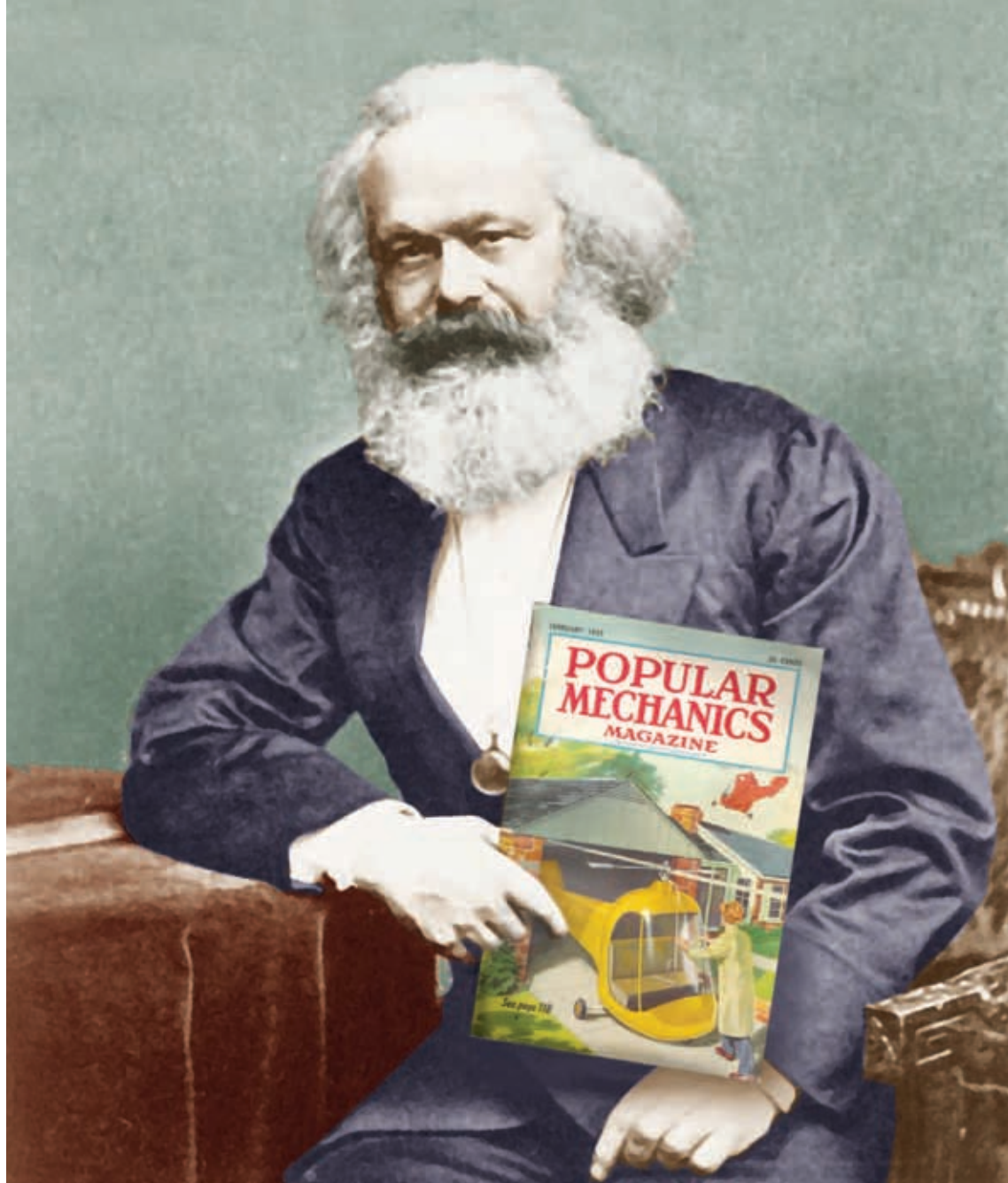
You might see one or two at a collector's fair or antiquarian bookshop: dog-eared copies of *Popular Science* magazines from decades past, with covers promising a sunny future of expanded leisure time. There might be, for example, an illustration of a beaming Caucasian family in a hovercraft, weaving past city spires on a technicolour holiday.

For years, 20th century futurists prophesized the contraction of working hours, insisting this would be a source of celebration rather than concern. There would be plenty of free time to take advantage of increased productivity and technological progress. Every other day would be Family Day. Even junior would have a jet pack.

Only the first half of that proposition, the part about jobs disappearing, has turned out to be prophetic. It's the second half about comfortable leisure time that's gone sideways. From the factory floor grasslands of Detroit to the defanged 'Irish Tiger' of Dublin, the industrialized world is swollen with millions of surplus workers who are bunking with parents or couch-surfing with friends. The digitization of film, music, print and almost every other form of cultural output – automation, in other words – is accelerating job insecurity everywhere.

There's a saying in Chicago business circles: "If you're not at the table, you're on the menu." So how did the underclass end up as toast for the .01 percent? How did we get from the can-do optimism of Henry Ford's first assembly lines to today's Age of Austerity, with levels of unemployment in the industrialized west not seen since the Great Depression? And why do so many of us seem to be working harder than ever, holding down multiple jobs for lesser pay, if we're lucky enough to be in the job market at all? What happened to the promise of expanding leisure time from the spiritual ancestors of today's TED speakers?

Economists scratch their balding heads and litter their blackboards with chalk marks, but can't seem to come up



with consistent answers. Most insist that the free market, even one dominated by monopolies and cartels, is its own best solution. However, at least one scholar predicted the present disorder of high unemployment, diminished wages and globalization as a logical consequence of capitalism. His name was Karl Marx.

In 1997, New Yorker economics correspondent John Cassidy recalled a conversation with a college friend who ended up working on Wall Street at a big investment firm. "The longer I spend on Wall Street, the more convinced I am that Marx was right," he told Cassidy. "There is a Nobel Prize waiting for the economist who resurrects Marx and puts it all together in a coherent model. I am absolutely convinced that Marx's approach is the best way to look at capitalism." After this counterintuitive encounter, Cassidy dipped into an anthology of writings of the long-dead white male and discovered he was mostly in agreement with his friend.

In this age of bailed-out banksters and proles

served pink slips, Marx is enjoying something of a resurrection. In 2009, a speech by Ryerson political economist Leo Panitch – a Marxist – became a cover story for *Foreign Policy* magazine, the bible of the Washington political establishment. Canadian author Ronald Wright drew from Marx's analysis of economic history in his 2004 Massey Lecture series, "A Short History of Progress." In 2011, economist Nouriel Roubini, the man who forecast the financial crisis of '08 declared that the German-born thinker "was partly right."

According to Marx, the capitalist pursuit of surplus value results in squeezing the worker for ever-greater amounts of output, most often by demanding longer hours. In his magnum opus, *Das Kapital*, the author rifled through reports of factory inspectors and newspaper articles to lift the veil on the horrifying working conditions in Victorian England factories, in which child labour was the raw material for the industrial revolution.

Marx knew there was only one way to avoid this trap – the workers "have to put their heads together

and, as a class, compel the passing of a law, an all-powerful social barrier by which they can be prevented from selling themselves and their families into slavery and death by voluntary contract with capital.”

But even collective action offers no final protection against automation, Marx noted. Under the right circumstances, capitalists find expenditure in labour-saving machinery to be a money-saving gambit over time, with the added benefit of reducing a problematic work force. Automation also intensifies the competition for jobs, by creating what Marx calls an “industrial reserve army” of the unemployed – a “mass of human material always ready for exploitation.”

Before the financial meltdown of ‘08, why did a Wall Street investment guru congratulate Washington for holding the unemployment rate at eight percent, when a lesser figure would presumably be more socially desirable? Likely because eight percent is too small to incite mass unrest, but big enough to warn off the working 92 percent. Marx: “The industrial reserve army, during the periods of stagnation and average prosperity, weighs down the active army of workers; during the periods of overproduction and feverish activity, it puts a curb on their pretensions. The relative surplus population is therefore the background against which the law of the demand and supply of labour does its work.”

The bearded prophet’s most hotly contested thesis is that capitalism invariably leads to the increasing ‘immiseration’ or impoverishment of the workers. Economic professors have misinterpreted this as an absolute drop in wealth, says conservative British journalist Francis Wheen in his study *Marx’s Das Kapital*. “Look at the working classes of today, with their cars and microwave ovens: not very immiserated, are they? The American economist Paul Samuelson has said that Marx’s entire oeuvre can safely be disregarded because the impoverishment of the workers ‘simply never took place’ and since Samuelson’s textbooks have been the staple fare for generations of undergraduates in both Britain and America, this has become the received wisdom.”

Wheen dismisses this as a “myth” and proceeds to pop Samuelson’s balloon: “What Marx did say was that under capitalism there would be a relative, not absolute, decline in wages. This is demonstrably true: no firm enjoying a 20 percent increase in surplus value will hand over all the loot to its workforce in the form of a 20 percent pay rise.”

Marx was referring to the “lowest sediment of society” – what we know today as the underclass – who would see a widening gap between themselves and the upper tiers as capitalism evolved. There are plenty of statistics showing that, over the past 40 years, income disparities have increased not just between the nations of the world, but within many of them as well. In a global race to the bottom, First World blue-collar and white-collar jobs have been outsourced to the developing world, in places free from bothersome labour rights and minimum wages. India is often held up as a winner in the globalization game, yet the nation’s

growing middle class and a spearhead of obscenely wealthy nouveau-riche have done little to improve the lives of millions of immiserated slum dwellers in Mumbai, Calcutta and elsewhere.

As productivity increases, the gains are not translated into greater leisure time for workers, but demands for even greater output from them, Marx insisted. This certainly holds true in the maquiladoras and free trade zones around the world, with their sweatshop workers cranking out track shoes, smartphones, and other export goods. (Marx said expanding productivity leads to periodic “crises of overproduction” in the industrialized west – what we now call the business cycle – where an excess number of goods and services chase a dearth of paying customers.)

There is an unwritten history of the struggles of



Why do so many of us seem to be working harder than ever, holding down multiple jobs for lesser pay, if we’re lucky enough to be in the job market at all? What happened to the promise of expanding leisure time from the spiritual ancestors of today’s TED speakers?

nameless men and women in Canada, the US and other industrialized countries, who organized and petitioned in the early years of the 20th century for the eight-hour workday and other workers’ rights. Today, the concessions wrung from big business by the International Workers of the World and the Cooperative Commonwealth Federation, among other groups, are in danger of being weakened or withdrawn altogether. For example, unpaid internships, which are nothing more than a way to extract free labour through hollow appeals to resume inflation, are now widely accepted and unquestioned.

That, in a nutshell, is what Eurozone austerity is all about. The arsonists (banksters) are in charge of the fire department, taking their axes to the social sector – all to service debts that are mostly of their own making. (According to the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, the people of Greece, supposedly a land of layabouts, worked on-average 2,032 hours in 2011 – a hairs-breadth less than the legendarily hard-working South Koreans, at 2,090 hours.)

Deindustrialization began in the late seventies in the US and the jobs exported to other parts of the world for lower wages are boomeranging back to the

continental US (“bringing the Third World home” in the words of MIT media critic Noam Chomsky). In spite of this unhappy pattern, some US economists are optimistic that the information economy will pick up the slack from years of downsizing, outsourcing, relocating and union decertification. Yet the hopes pinned on social media may be as dubious as the portrayals of hovercrafts and jetpacks in vintage editions of *Popular Science* – at least in the near term. To take just one sobering factoid, you could take all the employees from four of the biggest social media organizations – Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and Groupon – and seat them in Madison Square Garden.

The average British employee now puts in 80,224 hours over his or her working life, compared with 69,000 hours in 1981. Similar figures hold in the US and Canada and that’s not including the labour voluntarily added beyond work hours, through email and other digital communications. Many of us are working harder for less than our parents did and growing numbers can’t find decent paying jobs of any kind. Productivity has gone up in North America for the past 30 years, while real wages have fallen or stagnated over the same period of time. Where have the profits gone? Mostly into the pockets of plutocrats, of course. That is the story of surplus value, retooled and retold for a technocratic age.

The mad logic of gangster capitalism, in which bubble economies transfer wealth to the top even as they pop, has brought Marx’s overheated rhetoric and insightful analysis back for a second reading. Yet many activists on the left have doubts about the man and his associations. That’s not only understandable, but necessary. Marx’s ideas have been seized on by totalitarian villains who defined Marxism in their own terms – from Joseph Stalin to Pol Pot to Mao Zedong – to underwrite some of the worst atrocities in history.

Marx himself famously said after an encounter with some of his revolutionary followers that he didn’t consider himself a Marxist. I don’t consider myself one either, but that doesn’t mean I can’t see merit in his century-old ideas. I can accept the Marx’s diagnosis of political economy without swallowing his dialectical prescription: a mythical worker’s paradise following the withering of the state. (An old joke from the pre-glasnost East Bloc sums up the problem of ends and means: “What is the definition of capitalism? The exploitation of man by man. And what is the definition of communism? The reverse.”)

The elites would prefer that wageslaves distract themselves with every blade of grass, shrub, sapling and tree. At the dawn of the modern era, Karl Marx attached a box camera to a gas-powered balloon and photographed the entire forest from high above. The pictures have faded over time, but the horizon still looks much the same.

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APR 2-25

Andean Wisdom Teachings with Jhaimy Alvarez-Acosta from Peru. Workshops, talks & healings. White Rock & Vancouver Island. www.childrenofthe7rays.com

APR 5-7

Introduction to Foot Reflexology commences Certificate Weekend Training Course. Introduction 7:30PM, \$10; Course \$395. Pacific Institute of Reflexology, (604) 875-8818, www.pacificreflexology.com

APR 6-7

Live, two-way video workshop with Paramahansa Nithyananda. Unblock destructive patterns & Akashic readings. Info: nithyananda.org, 604-442-7817, vancouver.puri@gmail.com

APR 10 & APR 13

Apr. 10: Rediscover your passion & creativity with The Mastery. Free, 7-9:30PM. **Apr. 13: 1-day mini-Mastery.** 9AM-9:30PM, \$99. www.themasteryworkshops.com or call John, 604-629-7590, john@themasteryworkshops.com

APR 13

Spring Cleaning for your Mind, Body & Soul: River Market, New Westminster, 11AM-5PM, free admission, all ages, demos, raffle. Supporting Canadian Cancer Society. https://www.facebook.com/pages/Spring-Cleaning-for-your-Mind-Body-Soul/468635583205930?ref=hl

APR 14

Free Intro Workshop: 2PM, Jyoti Meditation (Meditation on the Inner Light), Meditation & Ecology Centre, 11011 Shell Road, Richmond. Drop-ins welcome. Info: Linda, 604-985-5840.

APR 20

2013 Earth Day Celebration: Join students from Youth for Climate Justice Now (Y4CJN) for the 3rd annual Parade & Festival for Earth Day. 11AM-3PM, parade, speakers, musicians, performers & more. Gather at Commercial Dr. & Grandview Park, 11AM.

APR 20-21

"I Can Do It" – Spend the weekend listening to Wayne Dyer, Gregg Braden, Doreen Virtue,

Caroline Myss, and more. At Queen Elizabeth Theatre. 800-654-5126 or www.hayhouse.com/events

APR 20-28

Energy Healing Bodhi Meditation Complimentary Retreat and Thursday evening practices, 7740 Alderbridge Way, Richmond, (778) 551-1068/ (604) 276-2885, www.putimeditation.org. Classes see "ONGOING" session.

APR 21

Adventure into Time and Beyond with Rifa Hodgson presents a Past Life Regression Workshop: Re-discover Your Hidden Talents and Gifts. 10:30AM-1:30PM, West Vancouver, www.lifebetweenlives.ca/Events.htm, 1-888-606-8463.

APR 25

A Spiritual High Point: Come celebrate the Buddha's yearly return. "Wesak Legend and Full Moon meditation," 7PM, Roundhouse Community Centre (Pacific @ Davie). 778-866-9568, FREE.

APR 26-28

The Power of Presence: Eckhart Tolle's recent teaching, Swanwick Centre (near Victoria BC). Info: 250-744-3354, www.swanwickcentre.ca

APR 28

Free Class 2PM, Easy Steps to Start/Nourish Your Organic Garden. Meditation & Ecology Centre, 11011 Shell Rd. Richmond. Drop-ins welcome. Info/pre-registration: Linda, 604-985-5840.

MAY 4

Power of Visualization by Dr. Lee Pulos, Centre for Peace at Canadian Memorial Church, Vancouver, 9AM-4PM. Information: www.hypnosis.bc.ca, email: admin@hypnosis.bc.ca

MAY 4-5

German New Medicine 1-weekend course with John Theobald. 9:30AM-5:30PM, Saturday & Sunday. Course fee: \$300 + GST. Before April 19: \$250 + GST. Pacific Institute of Reflexology (604) 875-8818. www.pacificreflexology.com

MAY 8-28

21-day retreat in Bidadi, South India: Awaken your inner potential through the power of initiation by Paramahansa Nithyananda. Info: www.innerawakening.org

MAY 9

Judy Collins in concert: A legend comes to sing her hits, audience favourites and new surprises. Chan Centre, www.ticketmaster.ca 1-855-985-2787, www.judycollins.com

MAY 10-12

Introduction to Foot Reflexology commences Certificate Weekend Training Course. Introduction 7:30PM, \$10; Course \$395. Pacific Institute of Reflexology (604) 875-8818, www.pacificreflexology.com

MAY 23-25

Judith Hanson Lasater: Master yoga teacher and physiotherapist of 40+ years. Shoulder Therapeutics, Anatomy and Yoga Asana. For yoga teachers, yoga practitioners and physiotherapists. www.soulspringwellness.ca

MAY 26

Adventure into Time and Beyond with Rifa Hodgson presents Intuitive Experiential Workshop: Meet Your Personal Spirit Guide, 10:30AM-1:30PM, West Vancouver, www.lifebetweenlives.ca/Events.htm, 1-888-606-8463.

JUN 7-9

Shaktipat Initiation with Kundalini Master & Siddha Yogi Steven Sadleir www.selfawareness.com, Free talk 7-9PM Friday. Initiation 9:30AM-12NOON Sat. (\$25) Centre for Peace.

ONGOING

Brahma Kumaris Meditation Centre: Learn benefits of Raja Yoga meditation and wisdom of ancient spiritual knowledge. Offered free of charge. Please call 604-436-4795 to register. www.bkwsu.org/canada

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Start your week with Sunshine in Energy Healing Bodhi Meditation: Mondays 10-11:30AM, April 15-June 3 at Kitsilano Community Centre (604) 257-6976, www.kitscc.com

SUNDAYS

"If you like Wayne Dyer, you will love it here." Unity of Vancouver, Sundays 11AM, 5840 Oak Street, Vancouver. www.unityofvancouver.org

TUESDAYS

Reflexology Student Clinic 6-10pm. One-hour sessions \$20. By appointment only. Pacific Institute of Reflexology (604) 875-8818. www.pacificreflexology.com



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Thurs, April 25

6:30-8pm Talk at Banyen
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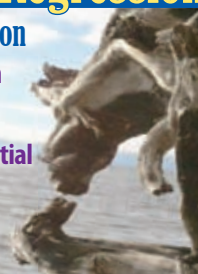
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Revolution: direct action to save us, and the planet, from ourselves.

Rob Stewart is the underwater filmmaker who, with *Sharkwater*, showed everyone it's safe to go back in the water; what's more, he opened our eyes to the barbaric practice of shark-finning. The film's impact came from gorgeous, up-close footage of different species of sharks combined with hard-hitting sequences of finned sharks being tossed back into the ocean still alive and writhing. The film was an urgent message to take action. *Revolution*, Stewart's latest documentary, is similar in its approach, but raises the stakes. This time, he's out to "save the human."

The doc is narrated as a personal journey with Stewart very much in the frame, as he learns about the critical state of many ecosystems around the world (including the tar sands) and gets involved with activists on the

frontlines. He's particularly interested in how the youth of today are campaigning for action on climate change, joining articulate youth delegates at UN climate talks in Cancun in 2010 and leading activists on 350.org campaigns. Stewart's prime focus is how climate change is taking its toll on the creatures that inhabit Earth's largest carbon sink: the ocean. Ocean acidification, caused by humans pumping increasing amounts of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere, is making it more difficult for marine creatures to form their protective shells. Coral reefs that once teemed with life are bleaching and dying off. Stewart's mentor, professor J.E.N. "Charlie" Veron, "the godfather of coral," tells us that such is the damage that no other human being will ever see the coral reefs as he has over his four-decade career. "The oceans have the potential to go belly up in the next 20 years," one of Stewart's diving buddies tells us, before diving into the Australia's Great Barrier Reef, which has lost half its coral cover.

Stewart's urgent call for a "revolution" – direct action, civil disobedience and applying pressure on poli-

ticians to act – will be a resonant one for many viewers. Time is running out. As University of Victoria climatologist Andrew Weaver says, scientists have done their job; now it's up to the politicians to do theirs.

The annual Reel 2 Real film festival returns this month (12-19), with around 80 films from 21 countries aimed at youth: from international dramas to films tackling issues like bullying. The festival opens with animation *Moon Man*, followed by a party and a 3D shadow puppet installation. The fest includes filmmaker Q&As, workshops, get-togethers and audience voting. Find out more at www.r2rfestival.org

Emperor (29th) is a creaky retelling of how the Americans "won" the peace in Japan after going nuclear, through understanding the psychology of the Japanese people and their emperor worship. The plodding storyline is hampered by constant melodramatic romantic flashbacks involving Matthew Fox as lead negotiator General Bonner Fellers. While intermittent scenes sparkle, usually involving Tommy Lee Jones playing to type as the gruff, no-nonsense General Douglas MacArthur, they quickly fizzle out. **C**

Robert Alstead is making the BC-set documentary **Running on Climate**.

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